

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SSC-01 AID-05 IO-13 /075 W

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4414

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 6954

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IV

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE CABINET RESHUFFLE: THE LONG GOODBYE

REF: ABIDJAN 6845 AND 5903

1. PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY IS HOLDING TWO MEETINGS THIS WEKK, BOTH OF THEM WIDELY PUBLICIZED IN PRESS AND BY THE RADIO-TV NETWORK, WHICH ARE BEING GENERALLY INTERPRETED AS PRELIMINARY STEPS WHICH WILL LEAD TO THE LONG-AWAITED ANNOUNCEMENT OF A CABINET RESHUFFLE, PROBABLY SOMETIME NEXT WEEK. THE FIRST MEETING, WHICH TOOK PLACE YESTERDAY, JULY 12, UNDER HOUPHOUET'S CHAIRMANSHIP, CONVOKED DIRECTORS OF INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES, BANK DIRECTORS, AND (BY SPECIFIC INVITATION) REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LEBANESE, SYRIAN AND MOROCCAN COMMUNITIES. THE SECOND AND LARGER MEETING, ALSO TO TAKE PLACE UNDER THE PRESIDENT'S CHAIRMANSHIP, WILL OCCUR ON FRIDAY, JULY 15, AND WILL INCLUDE ALL MEMBERS OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE IVORY COAST'S SOLE POLITICAL PARTY (THE PDCI-RDA), STEERING COMMITTEE, SECRETARYS GENERAL OF PDCI SUB-SECTIONS, CABINET, PARLIAMENTARIANS, MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, THE SUPREME COURT, IVORIAN AMBASSADORS WHO HAVE BEEN RECALLED TO ABIDJAN FOR CONSULTATION, PREFECTS, MILITARY COMMANDERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE IVORY COAST.

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2. YESTERDAY'S MEETING OF INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL REPRESENTATIVES DEALT, ACCORDING TO PRESS AND TELEVISION ACCOUNTS, WITH THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION AND THE NEED TO IVORIANIZE FIRMS DOING BUSINESS IN THE IVORY COAST AT A FASTER PACE. BEFORE THE MEETING THE LEBANESE AMBASSADOR TOLD ME THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LEBANESE COMMUNITY HAD BEEN EXPECTING TO BE CONVOKED FOR THIS PURPOSE AND BELIEVED THAT THEIR SESSION WITH HOUPHOUET WAS ONE

ELEMENT IN

THE METICULOUS PROCESS BY WHICH THE PRESIDENT WAS PREPARING FOR SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT. A SIMILAR MEETING HAD APPARENTLY BEEN CALLED PRIOR TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN 1975, AT WHICH THE TWO SAME THEMES HAD BEEN EMPHASIZED BY HOUPHOUET. REPORTS THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED OF YESTERDAY'S MEETING SUGGEST THAT IT FOLLOWED PREVIOUSLY PREPARED SCENARIO. HOUPHOUET ADDRESSED THE GROUP IN FAMILIAR TERMS, CALLING FOR THEIR COOPERATION IN HIS EFFORT TO SUSTAIN THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE IVORY COAST, TO FIGHT INFLATION, TO ABOLISH CORRUPTION, WHICH WAS AN IMPEDIMENT TO GROWTH, AND TO ACCELERATE IVORIANIZATION. AS USUAL, HOUPHOUET WAS CALM, EMPLOYED NO THREATS AND EMPHASIZED THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF HIS APPEAL. AFTER HOUPHOUET'S PRESENTATION, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS IN THE AUDIENCE RESPONDED ALONG PRE-ARRANGED LINES, EACH ONE ASSURING THE PRESIDENT OF HIS SUPPORT AND DESIRE TO COOPERATE.

3. COMMENT: THERE IS LESS AND LESS ROOM FOR DOUBT THAT CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY, AND MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THEY WILL BE SIGNIFICANT. EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER MCCONNELL, WHO COMPLETED A SWING THROUGH THE INTERIOR A WEEK AGO, FOUND THAT IN PROVINCIAL CAPITALS LIKE DALOA, BOUAKE AND ODIENNE, POLITICAL GOSSIP ABOUT RUMORED CHANGES WAS AS ANIMATED AS IT IS IN ABIDJAN AND FOLLOWED SIMILAR LINES. MINISTER OF PLAN DIAWARA, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE SAWADOGO AND MINISTER OF COMMERCE SERI GNOLEBA CONTINUE TO BE THE PRIME CANDIDATES FOR RESHUFFLING.
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FINANCE MINISTER KONAN BEDIE, DEFENSE MINISTER M'BAHIA BLE, EDUCATION MINISTER AKOTO YAO AND FOREIGN MINISTER USHER ALSO FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN THE SPECULATION, ALTHOUGH THEIR POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND/OR PERSONAL TIES WITH HOUPHOUET ARE RECOGNIZED TO BE COMPLICATING FACTORS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S STANDPOINT. FOR WHATEVER REASON, MOST OF THESE MINISTERS HAVE VIRTUALLY DROPPED FROM SIGHT IN THE PAST SIX WEEKS, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE REMAINED IN ABIDJAN, REPORTEDLY AT HOUPHOUET'S REQUEST. FINANCE MINISTER KONAN BEDIE IS THE EXCEPTION. HE ATTENDED THE FOURTH OF JULY RECEPTION - WHICH WE HELD ON JULY 11 TO AVOID CONFLICT WITH THE OAU MEETING IN LIBREVILLE -- AND RADIATED HIS USUALL BONHOMMIE AND CONFIDENCE.

4. TIMING OF THE CHANGES, IF AND WHEN THEY OCCUR, REMAINS A QUESTION MARK. WITH FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER GUIRINGAUD SCHEDULED TO BE IN ABIDJAN JULY 17-19, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE SUSPENSE WILL CONTINUE AT LEAST UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF NEXT WEEK.
STEARNS

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